

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 007862

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/21/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KISL](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: KING FACES IN TWO DIRECTIONS AS HE PROCEEDS WITH A CABINET RESHUFFLE

REF: AMMAN 7336

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. The King will proceed with a cabinet reshuffle and new government mandate in October, but in two contradictory directions: reinforcement of the cabinet reformists while redoubling efforts to silence Islamists and troublesome political activists in the professional associations. End summary.

2. (C) Royal Court Minister al-Rifai reconfirmed to Charge on September 22 that the King planned a cabinet reshuffle that would retain Fayez as Prime Minister but reinforce the powers of the key reformists. The changes will come following a cabinet retreat, in which the current government would review their accomplishments (a short session, Rifai quipped), and the new team, once announced, would also go on a retreat to set its new mission. Rifai said the reformed cabinet would dispense with a deputy prime minister, in favor of a set of "team leaders" who could organize activities across line ministries. He cited three such teams -- administrative reform, economic development, and socio-economic reforms. This change almost certainly signals the departure of Deputy PM/Trade and Economy Minister Halayqa, whose title and theoretical power as DPM were conditions for membership in the current government. As the at times vicious frenzy of maneuvering over the impending cabinet shuffle accelerated, Halayqa appears to have become the scapegoat of many of his cabinet rivals, who say his lackluster performance demonstrates the irrelevance of the whole concept of a deputy prime minister. The "team leaders" approach appears tailor-made for the aggrandizement of Planning Minister and leading reformist Bassam Awadallah, who -- whether leader or not of each team -- can be counted on to have the loudest voice and greatest energy level in any group setting.

3. (C) Rifai said the flip side of reinforcing reforms would be cracking down on opposition elements that have "crossed the line." He said the King is determined to have the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and the secular professional associations "stop attacking us, our policies, and our friends." If the new Fayez team fails to achieve that aim, and to move the government's bills through parliament, its tenure would be short. Rifai acknowledged that this course of action would be tricky, given the IAF's strong profile in the country. But as the government moved forward on a new parties law (which Rifai did not expect to occur within the life of the next parliament), a level playing field was needed. The IAF could not be the only party with access to charitable funds, nor could professional associations continue to play politics. While clipping the wings of Islamic oppositionists, Rifai said the Hashemites would be promoting a more moderate, tolerant message and identifying the extremist rhetoric and activism as being outside Islam.

4. (C) While pleased with Jordan's robust growth this year of over seven percent, Rifai described the King as concerned that the growth of income was distributed unevenly. He said few would support needed tax increases if more was not done to spread the wealth -- hence a renewed public focus by the leadership on poverty alleviation and job creation.

5. (C) Comment: Rifai inadvertently cast a spotlight on the irony of the King's approach: strengthening government reformists (including FM Muasher, who, rumors to the contrary, still appears secure in his job) while cracking down on oppositionists. The public generally accepts both the IAF and the associations as part of Jordan's political furniture. The public is also generally receptive to some of their messages, particularly when it comes to government nepotism, corruption, and foreign policy issues. Many Jordanians, even if they do not support the IAF, see it as a moderating and basically stabilizing factor, as it has been in alliance for years with the Hashemites as a bulwark first against the leftists and now against some more extreme Islamic tendencies. Rifai's suggestion that the GOJ is moving nowhere fast on the political parties law (and presumably the elections law) reinforces a widely-held belief among Jordanians that the GOJ only pays lip-service to political reform. There is an irony (and danger) in the government's approach. By strengthening reformers, but failing to implement key political reforms to facilitate active popular participation and create viable alternatives

to the IAF, the GOJ will find it hard to create the "level playing field" Rifai says the King is looking for.

16. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

Visit Embassy Amman's classified website at  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman/> or access the site  
through the State Department's SIPRNET home page.  
HALE